Rules

To Build Ships

By Corp. Fred Wiemar

TO BUILD SHIPS.....

When the scene opens there is blackness on the stage. Only the shipyard lights prick through the dark in the background. There is the occasional blue flare and shower of sparks from the welders' arc.

Voices come from the darkness, scattered across the stage. It is a voice here and there, but as the argument takes form and their conviction grows there is a gradual forward movement and the grouping is closer and closer, till at the end all workers are closely massed behind the shop steward the old man and the young worker, backing up their words.

From spots picking out a single voice, lighting picks up the central groupings that carry the theme. General lighting comes up behind the mass of workers, throwing them into silhouette seen from the audience. At the conclusion lighting is full ... the midnight shift is over..it is dawning.

The voice of the ship is deep and strong.....

TO BUILD SHIPS.....

NARRATOR: The builders of ships ....
a thousand men
and the strength of giant cranes
I am the pounding of rivet guns
the steel-throated clatter of plates
and the searing path
of a tossed rivet;
the cutting flame of a torch
and the hiss of the weld ...
steel on steel ...
green-white flame
arched against the night
banners of heat fragments-
the strength
and sound
of a thousand men....

And the ship is growing...
growing...
and building from a steel-ribbed skeleton
lying lifeless against the stench
of the harbor drift
and the slime-film of oil
and the washing
of broken lumber and newspapers
and damp rotting smells...

VOICE OF SHIP: I am the strength
and sound
of a thousand men ....

EUROPEAN WORKER: I came
Ten thousand miles
across white water
in a rusty-sided ship
reeking
with the smell
of bilge, and fish,
and the lumber cargoes carried.
Steerage
and motor rumble
throbbing over the water
and the sea sound against rusty plate..
rising and falling
pushing a weight of water
leaving a widening mark
scars
in the scribeless face
of the sea.
ploughing forward...
I cam ten thousand miles
across broad land
and white water
to build ships.....

SCOTCH WORKER: And the tang of heather
is sharp and home in my nostrils
sudden
hear the throaty names
of lochs and smoky lakes
high in the northern mountains
and the shrill yell of pipes
swish of tartan and kilt
and pluming chimneys
and gantry cranes
and wooden staging
in other shipyards
Glasgow
and ships of steel
to Canada
to build ships...

VOICE OF SHIP; I am the strength
the sound
of a thousand men
and the total
of what they are
I am....

ENGLISH VOICE: London is a strange city
a city that boils
the blast furnace
that smelts man
from the lumpy ore of humanity,
strong old streets
the voices of the world
calling up its winding streets
a million tales
of a million births and dyings
small wiry men
in peak caps
hurrying down their streets
down the dockways
through the harbors,
into the ocean
into the growing throng ---
to build ships.....

CHINESE WORKER: China is old
China is wise in her age
in the furrowed brow of her hills
and the stretching palms
of her fields
China lies broad
rich and fertile
black growing earth
and all of her millions
Names that create
the illusion
in the imaginative mind
of romance and the exotic.

China lies bleeding
torn to her vitals
China fights with the strength
of her thousand dragons
of her millions of people
I am China
with the flame of my welding torch
I am China
with the hiss of the cutting arc
I am China
with the growing ship
I am China ...
to build ships.....

VOICE OF SHIP: I am the strength
the sound
of a thousand men
and the growing
of their unity
is my strength...

NEGRO WORKER: The liquid laugh of the South
the brown smiling mouth
the firm strength
of the muscles form
tones of brown light
tints of Africa...
my fathers were slaves
and before that my fathers
were warriors
strong with the strength
of a thousand lions
brave with the courage
of a thousand tigers
Alive with the life
of the wrld itself
then they were slaves ...
and after they were freed
and there is me ..
now to me
all of their past
my past
to my present...
to build ships...

NASAL VOICE: This stuff is all baloney
what are you trying to say?
The strength and the sound
of a thousand men.
That's pretty talk
but it doesn't mean anything.

WORKER'S VOICE: Listen bud,
do you build ships?
do you know what its like
to see the strength of yourself
and all of your comrades
grow
from the dead ore of the earth
to live steel
pulsing with the life
that you have given to it ...
do you know that?

NASAL VOICE: Aw nuts !

OLD MAN: Have you carried a lunch pail
into the crowd
that is on a ferry boat
and burst
like floods from a dam
into the yard,
into another day
of building
the biggest live thing
built by man?

NASAL VOICE: You're crazy!
A ship alive!
You're crazy!
(laughs)
Crazy as a bedbug,
a ship alive!
(laughs again)

WOMAN WORKER: The ship is alive, Mac,
The ship is real and alive
it has a life
that takes the lives
of other men
and throws them together
and out of their creation
it creates something for them

NASAL VOICE; Yeah, that's interesting
very interesting
but prove it.

OLD MAN: You can't see it?
You haven't seen men grow
to know the strength
of their creative power
of their ability
to give life
to cold steel plates
that lie rusting
on railroad sidings ...
you haven't seen that ?

NASAL VOICE: Whaddya talking about, bud?
Come to life ..
That stuff sounds pretty
but its all malarkey!

YOUNG WORKER: Listen fellow,
I'm just a plain guy
see
I don't have any frills on my talk
I say what I think
when I think it
and I don't give a hoot
for anyone
I know what these guys
are talking about
I build ships
I see it every day
I can see that growing stuff happening
because I'm part of it, see ...
that's why I can see it...

VOICE OF SHIP: I am the strength and sound
of a thousand men
I am the ship
that lives
because they give me life

ALL WORKERS: Hear it, can't you hear it,
the ship knows too,
hear it telling you ....

NASAL VOICE:
(to no one
in particular) They're all crazy.
What can a ship say?
What can it give men?
Men give it their sweat,
I can see that ...
They give it their strength,
I can see that,
but what can a ship give a man ...
break his heart maybe ...
They're all crazy.

SHOP STEWARD: Say bud,
have you ever heard a song?
They call it 'Hold the Fort'
that's what the ship can give you,
that's the strength that we are talking about.
The strength of all of us
strength that lives because...
well, because of shipbuilding...
because of the creating
and the growing
of steel ribs and metal plates.

NASAL VOICE: You're just getting around
to talking about unions.

SHOP STEWARD: Yeah,
I guess if you want
to put it into one word
you could call it unions,
but it's more than that
it's what they stand for that I mean
what the knowledge
of the ability to create
and build

NASAL VOICE: (interrupting) Unions, baloney, I know about them.

ALL WORKERS: Oh you know about them
do you ....
then you know what we mean,....

NASAL VOICE: No you're all crazy
You don't know what you mean
no you're all crazy....

ALL WORKERS: Not us, not us
we know we aren't.

NASAL" VOICE: Unions mean strike ...

ALL WORKERS: Nuts.

NASAL VOICE; Strikes are subversive ...

ALL WORKERS; Right ! That's right !

NASAL VOICE: Wait a minute ...
Who are you trying to rib?
Unions mean strike
We all know that ..

ALL VOICES: Nuts.

NASAL VOICE: Are you trying to rib me?

SHOP STEWARD: No
We are trying to tell you something
But you won't listen
Ships have given something
to shipbuilders.

ALL VOICES: (laughingly) But he can't see that.

SHOP STEWARD: Ships have given us a strength.

ALL VOICES: But he can't see that.

SHOP STEWARD: Ships are us.

ALL VOICES: But he can't see that.
He says that's crazy.

NASAL VOICE: Sure you're crazy....

YOUNG WORKER: Wait ...
let me tell him.
There's a war on.

NASAL VOICE: I know that.

YOUNG WORKER: But let me tell you ....
It has to be won.

NASAL VOICE: I know that too...
say, what has all this got to do
with what you say about ships?

YOUNG WORKER: Plenty, bud, plenty.
The ships are our contribution
they are our weapon
our blow for victory
Every ship that we build
means victory
all of us go to sea
can you see that ...

NASAL VOICE: You're going around in circles
But go on ..

YOUNG WORKER: And there is something
that we are building
every time we build a ship
unity ...
among ourselves
so that we can be strong
so that we can build more ships.

NASAL VOICE: Sounds good.

SHOP STEWARD: Here it is ..
building ships
is part of what we are doing.
it is important
most important right now,
but we are building something else too...
that's what he means
and what I mean.
We are building something
because we build ships
and for all men.
Building ships is doing it for us
and we are doing it
because we are shipbuilders.

because we want to make more ships
because we want to go down to the sea
with our ships
across the sea
with our ships
every turn of its propellor
us
every throb of its motor
us
every cargo that it carries
us,
and the something else
that we are building
is unity amongst ourselves
strength among ourselves
knowledge of our power
and strength...

ALL WORKERS: And that happens to everyone
everyone that builds gets to know that
everyone that works to create
knows it ...

SHOP STEWARD: But we know it
because we build ships,
Sure,
everyone gets to know it
most working people know it
We see it giving us unity.

ALL WORKERS: That's it. That's what we mean.

NASAL VOICE: But that isn't life!

SHOP STEWARD: Not the kind
that talks
and laughs
brother,
but it is life,
the life of a thousand men
the life of our country
and the strength of our country too..

NASAL VOICE: Can you call that life?

SHOP STEWARD: We do,
because we know it is,
It is something that we can all
be part of
and it is part of us
too.

NASAL VOICE: I sort of get what you mean..

SHOP STEWARD: We've fought hard for it
for a long time
we've fought hard
for the things

that building ships
is giving to us now,
we are building ships,
more and more ships
in a growing armada
more and more
every day we are building more
hammering more rivets
~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~
welding more seams
speeding up the growth of ships
we're beginning to get it too ..
Ships for victory ...

NASAL VOICE: (interrupts) That's corney.

ALL WORKERS: But' it's true,
they are ships for victory
and that's why we are building them
because that victory
is our victory
the victory of all of us
and we are building them
from the many people we are
the life that we are..
More ships
always more ships
better ships
in less time
Our ships,
that's what we want ...

NASAL VOICE: Sure,
that's right
I can see that
and the other ~~xxxx~~ stuff too,
It's good
we have to build ships
and let them build us to..
Solidarity,
that's what we need,
more and more of it
unity ...
gee...

VOICE OF SHIP: I am the strength and the sound
of a thousand men..
and as they grow
I grow...
and as they give to me
I give to them...

ALL WORKERS: We are building..
creating...
growing...
TO BUILD SHIPS.....

WORKER: Ships that mean victory
that mean heavy cargoes
to free the world from salvery...

ALL WORKERS: that mean unity
of those that build...

NASAL VOICE: Strength.....

SHOP STEWARD: And the sound
of a thousand men...

ALL WORKERS: And ours is an army
rank on rank
stretching as far as the eye can see

ONE WORKER: and there are others

TWO WORKERS: yes others..
many other.

ONE WORKER: In steel

TWO WORKERS: In the mines...

FOUR WORKERS: making planes..

ALL :
to a crescendo and textiles
and precision instruments
and logging
and fishermen
and the farmers..

SHOP STEWARD: a growing army
all of us an army

ALL WORKERS: Yes an army
giving the blood
and the sinew
to freedom
a living symbol
of all that our worker's heritage represents
the brilliant
everlasting flame
that forges the keen steel of freedom
from the strength
that we are.
from the freedom
that is born
of our right
to create.

We are the strength
we are the sound
[illegible]
we are the thousand men
the first thousand
and behind us other thousands
in other fields
those who also create
who also build

VOICES SOFTLY;
in monotone — Creating...building...growing

ALLWORKERS; — the army
whose uniform
is the overall
the hammer
. the rivetting gun
. the milling [illegible] machine
. the boring machine
. the scythe
. all of the tools
from which our strength is built

VOICES SOFTLY; — Creating building growing

WORKERS;
to crescendo; — Yes....creating...Building...GROWING
to build ships.
TO BUILD SHIPS